

## Message Text

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15  
ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 MCT-01

DHA-02 /070 W  
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R 030625Z SEP 76  
FM AMCONSUL ASMARA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4111  
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO  
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON  
COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC  
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN  
COMIDEASTFOR  
NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA  
NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI  
CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0686

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINS ET  
SUBJECT: SPORADIC INSURGENT ACTIVITY CONTINUES

REF: NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA 272320Z AUG 76 (NOTAL)

1. THERE WERE SEVERAL INCIDENTS DURING THE WEEK OF AUGUST 23 INITIATED BY INSURGENTS WHICH WOULD INDICATE THAT THEY ARE YET TO BE CONVINCED OF THE SINCERITY OF EPMG PEACE INITIATIVES. AT 9:30 AM ON AUGUST 26, TWO INSURGENT ASSASSINS ATTEMPTED TO KILL THE COMMANDER OF THE ASMARA MILITIA, BUT SUCCEEDED ONLY IN KILLING ONE BODYGUARD AND WOUNDING ANOTHER. IN THE EXCHANGE OF FIRE BOTH ASSAILANTS WERE WOUNDED AND ONE WAS LATER CAPTURED ALONG WITH A FEMALE ACCOMPLICE.

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2. AT 2:30 AM ON AUGUST 28, THE NORTHERN AND WESTERN OUTSKIRTS

OF ASMARA REVERBERATED FROM A 30-MINUTE FIREFIGHT DURING WHICH INSURGENTS EMPLOYED ROCKETS AND EPMG TROOPS RESPONDED WITH MORTARS. REPORTS ARE CONFLICTING AS TO THE TARGET OF THE ATTACK, BUT IT IS KNOWN THAT CASUALTIES WERE FAIRLY HEAVY ON BOTH SIDES. SOURCES WITHIN THE SECOND DIVISION CLAIM THAT THE INSURGENTS SUCCESSFULLY RELEASED SIX OF THEIR REBELS, INCLUDING SEVERAL LEADERS, FROM AN AD HOC PRISON IN NORTHWESTERN ASMARA. THESE SOURCES ALSO REPORTED THAT ONE OF INSURGENT LEADERS RELEASED WAS PLF MILITARY COMMANDER ISSIAS AFEWORKE. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT PROMINENT LEADERS, ESPECIALLY SOMEONE LIKE ISSIAS, WOULD BE HELD IN SUCH AN EXPOSED POSITION. FURTHER, IF THERE HAD BEEN SUCH AN INSURGENT SUCCESS, OUR ERITREAN SOURCES WOULD SURELY BE ALL TOO WILLING TO EXTOLL IT. A MORE PREVALENT REPORT ON THE INCIDENT IS THAT INSURGENTS OVERRAN A POLICE CANINE UNIT LOCATED IN A CIVIL PRISON IN NORTHERN ASMARA. THIS UNIT'S DOGS ARE USED TO SNIFF OUT FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES. ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT, FIVE POLICEMEN FROM THE UNIT WERE ABDUCTED, ONE DOG KILLED AND ANOTHER TAKEN AWAY.

3. DURING EVENING OF AUGUST 28 A SERIES (REPORTS RANGE FROM TWO TO FIVE) OF DISTANT EXPLOSIONS WERE HEARD IN ASMARA. IT WAS SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED THAT THEY SIGNALLED AN INSURGENT EFFORT TO SEVER THE TWO PARALLEL POWER LINES FROM THE BELEZA POWER PLANT, ASMARA MAIN POWER SOURCE, 18 KM NORTH OF ASMARA. THE TOWER TRANSMISSION LINE FROM BELEZA WAS SEVERED AS ONE TOWER WAS TOPPLED, WHILE THE POLE LINE WAS DAMAGED, BUT NOT SEVERED. POWER TO ASMARA WAS REDUCED, BUT WAS ADEQUATE FOR MOST REQUIREMENTS. REPAIRS TO BOTH LINES WERE COMPLETED SEPT. 1.

4. COMMENT: WHATEVER THE TARGET OF THE AUGUST 28 INCIDENT, IT IS CLEAR FROM THE BOLDNESS AND THE INTENSITY OF THE EXCHANGE THAT THE INSURGENTS REMAIN PREPARED TO EXPLOIT ANY OPPORTUNITY AFFORDED THEM TO HAND THE EPMG FORCES A SETBACK, DESPITE THE CONTINUING PEACE EFFORTS OF THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE INCIDENT WAS PLANNED TO OFFSET RADIO ASMARA BROADCASTS OF THAT WEEK AND OTHER RECENT EPMG MEDIA REPORTS WHICH FEATURED INSURGENT DEFECTORS CLAIMING THAT THE REBEL LEADERSHIP WAS IN SUCH DISARRAY THAT THE INSURGENCY WAS EFFECTIVELY ENDED. WHILE ERITREANS WOULD NOT BE INCLINED TO BELIEVE SUCH TRANSPARENT ASSERTIONS, THE INSURGENTS OFTEN REACT SHARPLY TO EPMG DISINFORMATION, UNDERMINING SUCH CLAIMS BEFORE THEY CAN GAIN CREDENCE.

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RE REPORT THAT ISSIAS AFEWORKE WAS AMONG THOSE FREED, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANY CONFIRMATION OF ETHIOPIAN ARMY RUMORS THAT HE WAS CAPTURED IN AN EPMG-LAUNCHED ENVELOPMENT COUNTERING AN INSURGENT AMBUSH NEAR KEREN IN LATE MAY. IN FACT, THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL REPORTS OF HIS ACTIVITIES IN VARIOUS PARTS OF ERITREA DURING THE PERIOD OF ALLEGED CAPTIVITY. FURTHER, IF HE HAD BEEN CAPTURED, EPMG MEDIA WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE TRUMPETED LOUDLY AT THE TIME. ONE POSSIBLE REASON FOR INCLUSION OF HIS NAME IN THIS

VERSION OF THE AUGUST 28 INCIDENT IS A FACE-SAVING DEVICE SHOULD  
ANYONE CHALLENGE THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY HERE TO PRODUCE ISSIAS.  
SLUTZ

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, CIVIL DISORDERS, POLITICAL SITUATION, ERITREA  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 03 SEP 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** coburnhl  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976ASMARA00686  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D760334-0992  
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**Line Count:** 118  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION AF  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** coburnhl  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 12 MAY 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <12 MAY 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by coburnhl>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** SPORADIC INSURGENT ACTIVITY CONTINUES  
**TAGS:** PINS, ET  
**To:** STATE ADDIS ABABA  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006